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SUBJECT: ARGENTINA ELECTIONS: RADICALS INVITE PRODIGAL
CHILDREN HOME; PRO'S MICHETTI ANNOUNCES IN BA

REF: A. BUENOS AIRES 0402

[1](#)B. BUENOS AIRES 0452

[1](#)C. BUENOS AIRES 0429

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Building on the positive public sentiments generated by the memorializing of the late President Raul Alfonsin (ref A), Argentina's once-dominant Radical Party (UCR) continued its gradual return to relevance with a successful national convention April 17-18 in Mar del Plata. The convention officially annulled the party's excommunication of Radicals who aligned with the Kirchner Victory Front in 2007, including Argentine VP Julio Cobos. Civic Coalition (CC) leader Elisa Carrio, a former UCR member, embraced Alfonsin's son Ricardo Alfonsin as the two parties prepared to run together in the June mid-terms. In its stronghold of Buenos Aires city, the UCR-CC-Socialist coalition will face-off against a list headed by PRO (Republican Proposal) star and former Vice Mayor Gabriela Michetti, who moved off the fence April 20 by announcing she would resign her job as Mayor Mauricio Macri's deputy and head PRO's national deputy list in the city. Current polls reportedly give Michetti a 10 or more point advantage over a CC-UCR ticket. End Summary.

The Alfonsin Effect

[1](#)2. (U) Argentina's once-great party of the middle class, the Radical Civic Union (UCR), continued its slow return from the wreckage of the failed de la Rúa presidency with a hopeful national convention April 17-18 in Mar del Plata. The meeting built on commemorations of the late Raul Alfonsin, whose March 31 death provoked a non-partisan upwelling of national pride in Argentina's democracy (ref A). Convention speakers contrasted Alfonsin's role in restoring democracy and the UCR's emphasis on governing institutions with what they alleged to be political aggrandizement and dishonesty under the Peronist administrations of President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (CFK) and former President Nestor Kirchner.

[1](#)3. (U) The focus of the UCR Convention was on the reintegration of strayed Radicals, including Vice President Julio Cobos (previously banned "for life" by the party for running alongside CFK as part of the Victory Front in 2007). Cobos was invited to rejoin the party when he ceases to be Vice President under CFK. Cobos, who had planned to attend the convention, announced in the days leading up to it that he would not attend because he would be serving as acting President while President Kirchner was attending the Summit of the Americas.

[1](#)4. (U) Also coming home, though she did not rejoin the party, was Civic Coalition (CC) leader and former Radical Elisa Carrio. Carrio, the runner-up to CFK in the 2007 presidential contest, was given a prominent speaking role at

the convention. Her praise for the values and policies represented by the UCR won applause, as did her embrace of Raul Alfonsin's son Ricardo at the close of the convention. Socialist Party leader Ruben Giustiniani also attended. His party represents the third piece of the left-of-center alliance taking shape for the June 2009 mid-terms along with the CC and the UCR, which varies per district.

Candidate Lists

¶5. (SBU) Not attending the convention was the CC's top candidate for national deputy in the Province of Buenos Aires (PBA), Margarita Stolbizer. (Note: She said she did not attend because she was not invited; the UCR leadership told the press no slight was intended in this. End Note.) A UCR officer confirmed to PolOff April 21 that the parties have agreed that Stolbizer will lead their combined ticket in PBA, with Ricardo Alfonsin number two (despite the fact that "he is now the more popular"). Some polls, the UCR officer said, were showing close to a "three-way tie" in PBA among the tickets expected to be headed by Nestor Kirchner-Daniel Scioli, Francisco De Narvaez-Felipe Sola, and Stolbizer-Alfonsin, though the Stolbizer-Alfonsin ticket was in third place (see Ref B). (Note: Other polls show the CC-UCR ticket trailing the other two by as many as ten or twelve points. End Note.)

¶6. (U) For the city of Buenos Aires, UCR participants, including Alfonsin, pressed Carrio to lead the CC-Radical ticket against the strong PRO and dissident Peronist slate thought likely to be led by popular PRO Vice Mayor Gabriela Michetti (plans confirmed on April 20, see para 7). Carrio

stuck to her guns, saying that former Central Bank head Alfonso Prat-Gay would head the ticket in Buenos Aires, while repeating her willingness to run as second on the list, which she expressed publicly shortly before the convention. On April 21 she announced she would take third place, behind Prat-Gay and UCR representative Ricardo Gil Lavedra. Her original position had been not to run for Congress at all, then to let herself appear "seventh or eighth".

Michetti Takes the Plunge

¶7. (U) Ending nearly ten months of speculation and public tribulations, Buenos Aires Vice Mayor Gabriela Michetti on April 20 resigned her position and announced she would head the PRO ticket for Congress in BA city. Resignation was not a requirement to her appearing on the candidate slate for the mid-terms, but Michetti said she wanted to contrast the PRO's approach to elections with that of the ruling Peronists, particularly their decision to run what the press and opposition call "testimonial" candidates (Note: CFK has objected to the term, but it has stuck. Per ref C, it refers to elected officials whose names will appear as candidates on ballots to boost their party ticket's vote tallies but who have made clear they will not give up their executive branch positions to take their legislative seats if elected, turning the seats over to alternates. End Note). Michetti also said it had become too difficult for the city to work with the national government because of political rivalries and that she did not want to exacerbate the problem by acting as a congressional candidate and vice mayor. According to press reports, Michetti is leading in current polls by 10 percent or more over a CC-UCR ticket.

Comment: Inching Back into the Fray

¶8. (SBU) The UCR is reemerging as a credible organization in Argentine politics, but still one with only a modest popular following. Its worthy traditions of government investment in education and governing institutions have been shining more brightly for Argentines as they recall the promise of Raul Alfonsin's presidency and as more and more of them express concerns about the Kirchners' governing style. Indeed, the

UCR is one of the few parties in Argentina that honors some of the institutional formalities of a party by holding primaries and conventions, electing party authorities, etc. It also nominally retains a nationwide structure. The UCR was wise to strike an alliance with the CC and the Socialists for this year's mid-term elections. In 2011, the UCR could conceivably run behind the man who today is Argentina's most popular politician, Vice President Julio Cobos. Whether the Radicals' alliance with the CC and the Socialists would hold up in that case will be a major question, but it is one that does not have to be answered until after the mid-terms.

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